Steve Gallacci's

ALBEDO
ANTHROPOMORPHICS

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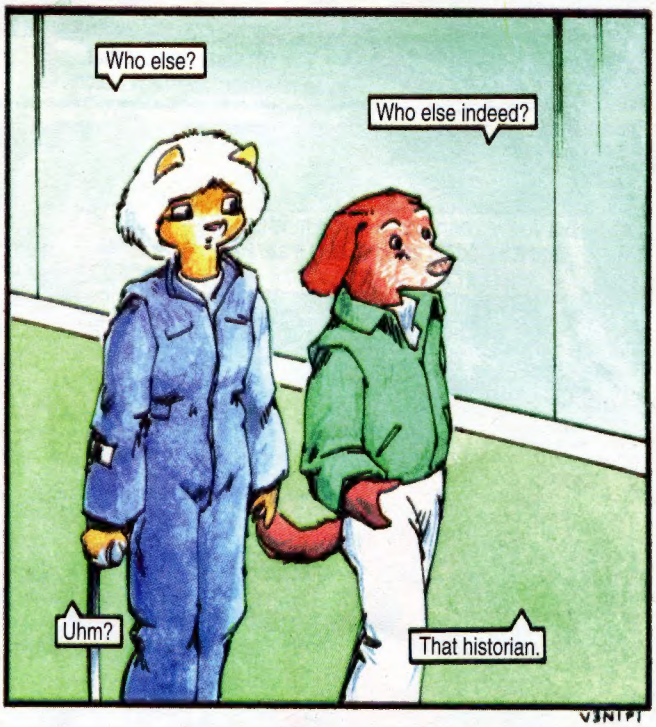
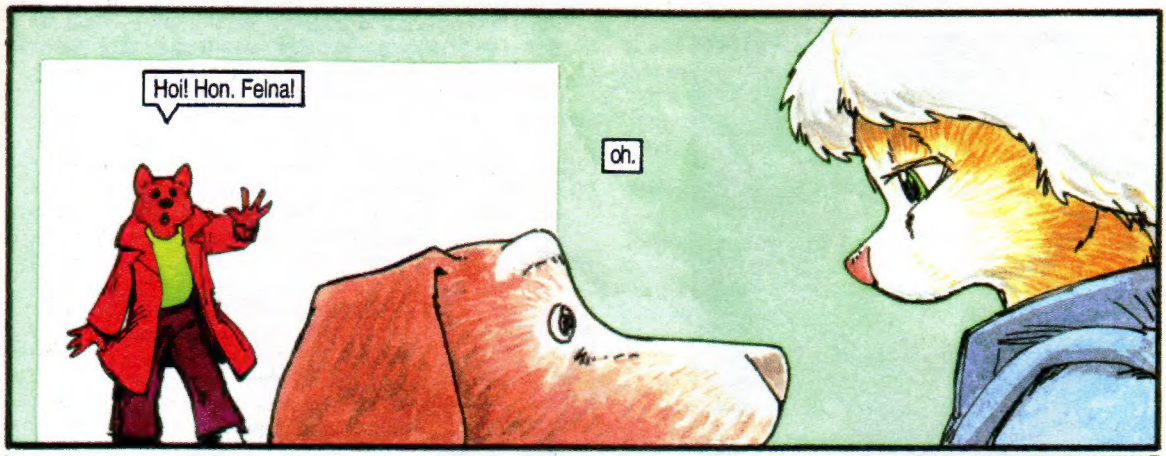
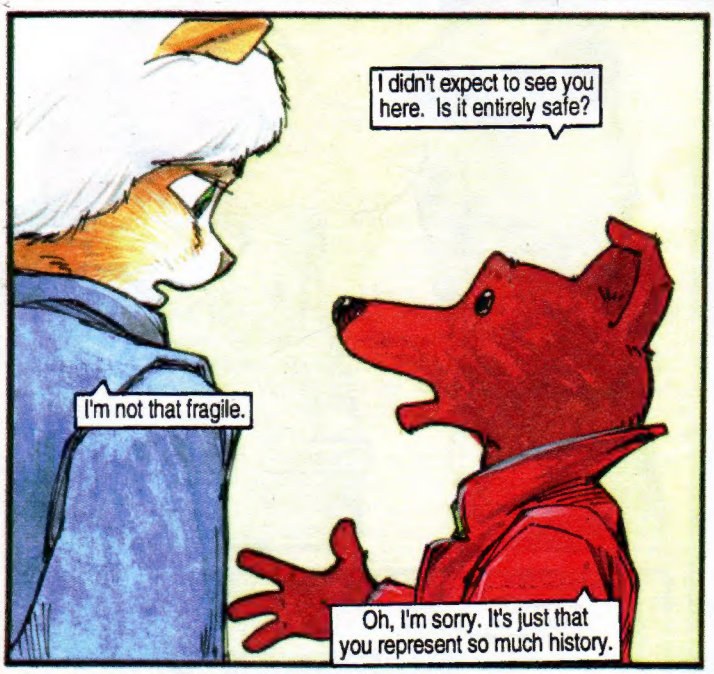
ANTHROPOMORPHIC

All New, ALL COLOR

SD 232.08.14
Kawahnaha Station, Chenta System, North Rim
The genetic constructs who make up the population of known space have been engineered to a moderate lifespan, usually sixty to eighty years. As aging and natural death are not commonly feared, geriatric medicine is intended to make life tolerable and allow the individual the best possible quality of life until the body or mind fall into failure. Erma Felna is old, and has suffered damage from ionizing radiation and the similar effects of "hard" intersteller jumps. She is not dying yet, but feels the years and knows she does not have many left.

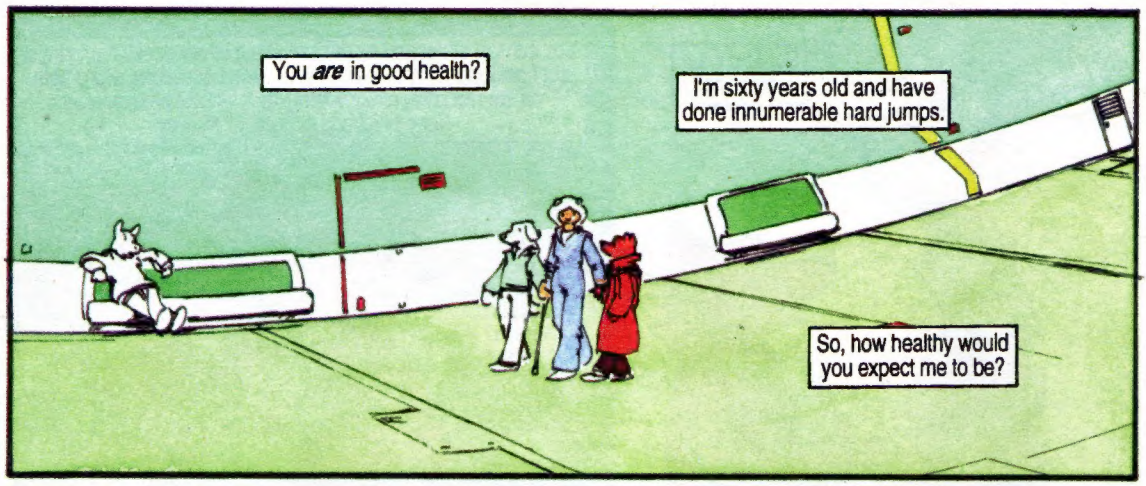



Hoi! Hon. Felna!
oh.


I didn't expect to see you here. Is it entirely safe?
I'm not that fragile.
Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that you represent so much history.

Now I feel ancient. And what relevance do the ramblings of a burned out space jockey have to *history*?

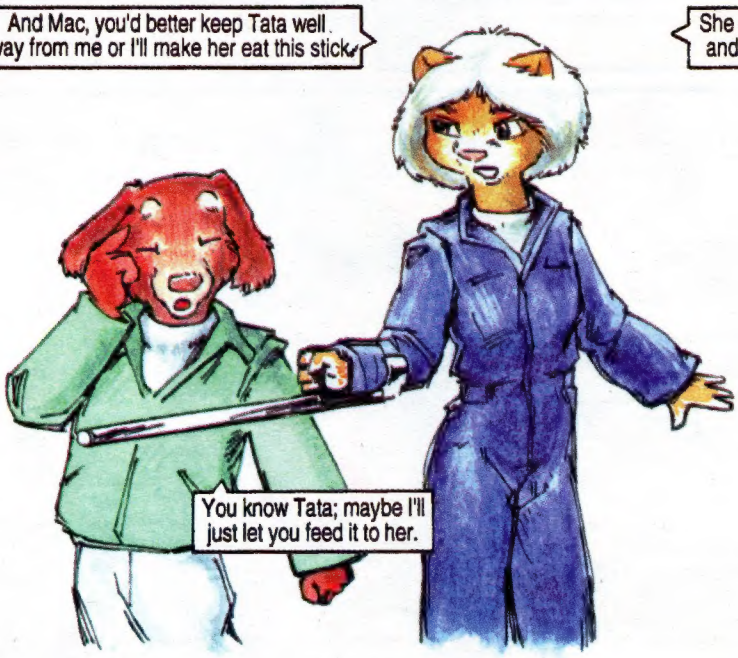
But you've been witness to so much. And it would be tragic to lose it all before it could be recorded.
Oh dear, so I am so fragile a vessel for such valuable information.
Tell me, doctor, am I going to drop dead anytime soon?
That's not funny.


You *are* in good health?
I'm sixty years old and have done innumerable hard jumps.
So, how healthy would you expect me to be?

Please, Hon. Feina. It *really is* important.

Well, since I suspect you won't leave me alone until I do.

... And since the council *has* approved it.


And Mac, you'd better keep Tata well away from me or I'll make her eat this stick.
You know Tata; maybe I'll just let you feed it to her.

She should have known better, and you and the rest should have stopped her.

So, where are you going?
First, an understanding.
You can tag along and record just about all my senile mutterings, but I get full editing access. And no direct questions. Put a note on the recording or something, but I will not be badgered. Keep quiet and stay out of my way.
Agreed?
Yes, Hon. Felna.
And drop the "Honorable Felna."
Everyone knows me as Erma, and half of them would have a spasm if they heard *that* name.
I don't understand?
After all this time, I've become either a saintly hero or demonic war-criminal to too many people, and this old white-haired woman isn't up to living either myth.
So now I'm just Gra'ma Erma.
And thinking of which, I've got an appointment with a crowd of waiting admirers.
Would that be your - ?
Yes. And I suppose you'd like to hear the tale of how that all happened?
If you wouldn't mind.
Then come along. They make for a more interested audience.

Ah, there they are.

Remember, be quiet and stay out of the way.

Yes, ma'am.

Gra'ma!

Gra'ma!

Gra'ma!

Hello, everyone.

Hello, Gran'mom.

Who the man?

He wants to listen to my stories.

Stories!

Stories! Stories!

Gra'ma stories!

That's right. And today's tale is about how I found Teka.

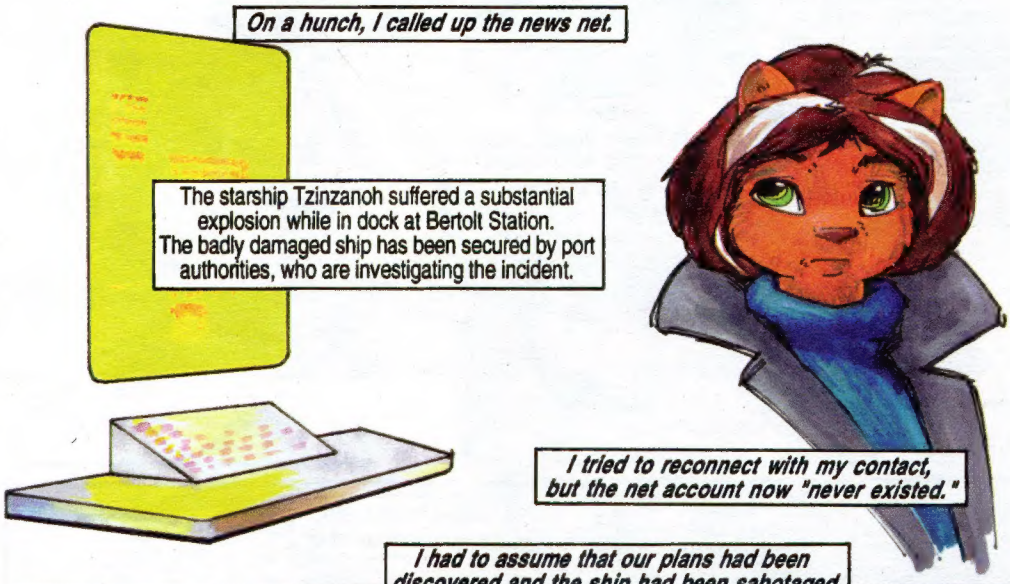
Oof, thanks.

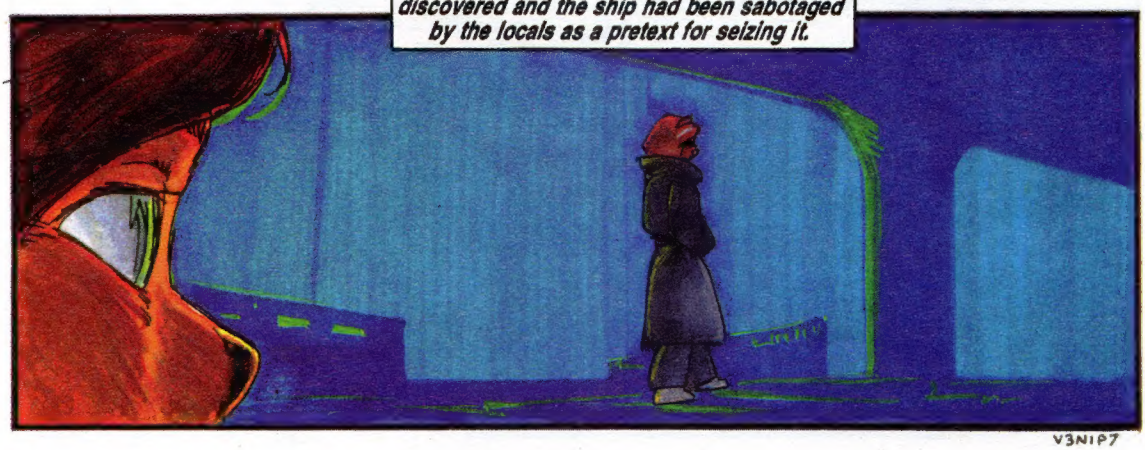
It was a trip to Denotah. We were trying to get some food processing nanotech for Tun Och Enchek. They had lost some key resources during the war and were finding out that they couldn't get things going again without outside help.

I think they bought it.
I should hope so. After all the trouble we went through.
Well, if we're supposed to be a government commission, we'd better look like it.
At that point, many governments were hoarding critical technological resources for their own use. The later stages of the war had gotten particularly nasty, and left governments hard and unsympathetic. As Tun Och Enchek was not a well-known or important place, no one was concerned if the colony lived or died. So, we had to con our way in and get the stuff, appearing to be someone more important.
You'll get to be officious here, and I'll go down-planet and get our real business straightened out.
Our arrangements took advantage of the partisanship and bureaucratic rivalries within the Denotah government. We knew our orders would not be cross-checked between offices, and if any problem arose, we could play off the paper-pushers' politics.
V3NIP6

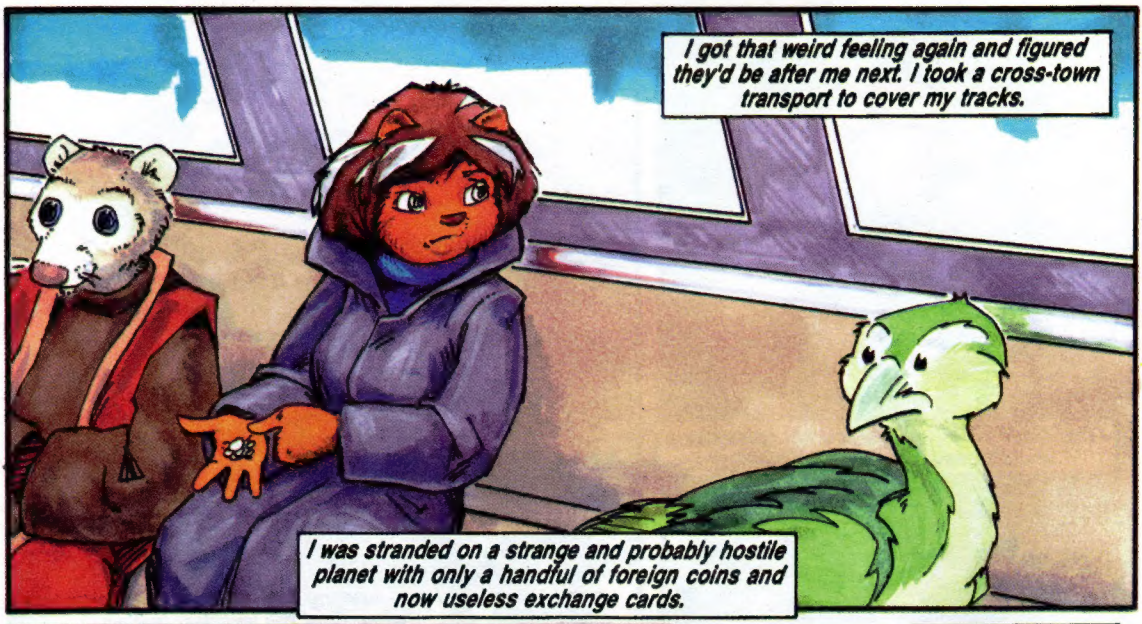
I had some time to kill before my rendezvous, so I checked out the retail district.

I was working on some nice local soup when I got the weirdest feeling.

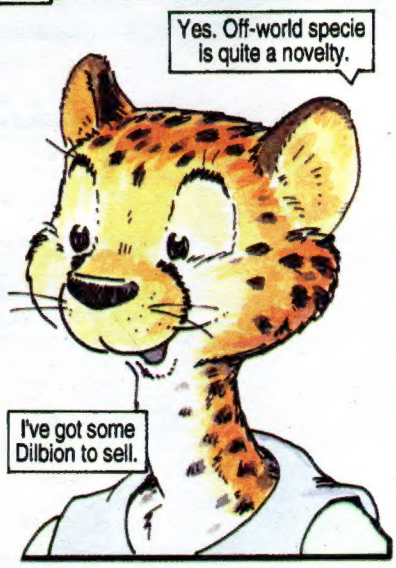

On a hunch, I called up the news net.
The starship Tzinzanoh suffered a substantial explosion while in dock at Bertolt Station. The badly damaged ship has been secured by port authorities, who are investigating the incident.
I tried to reconnect with my contact, but the net account now "never existed."


I had to assume that our plans had been discovered and the ship had been sabotaged by the locals as a pretext for seizing it.

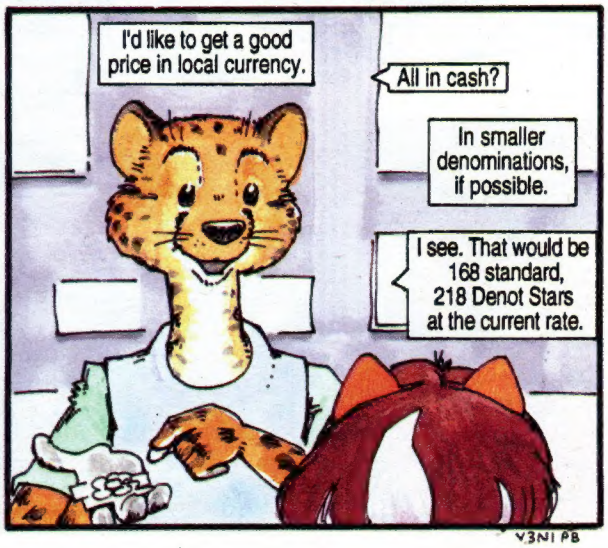
V3N1P7


I got that weird feeling again and figured they'd be after me next. I took a cross-town transport to cover my tracks.
I was stranded on a strange and probably hostile planet with only a handful of foreign coins and now useless exchange cards.

Say, all I've got with me is some Dilbion coinage. It ought to exchange for about 10 standard.
Dilbion, eh? Yeah, I could change it for you, but you'd do a lot better selling it as a collectable. Jack's, just down the street, can take care of you.
Thank you, very much.

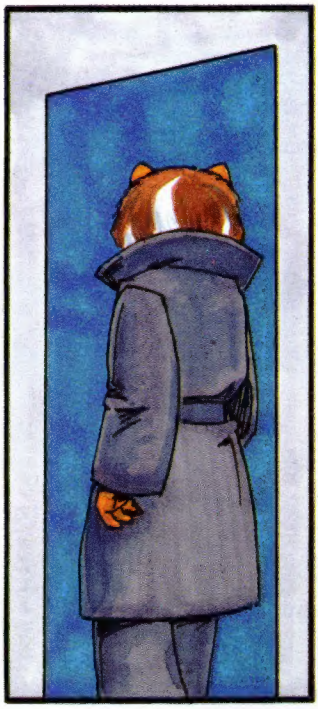

Yes. Off-world specie is quite a novelty.
I've got some Dilbion to sell.

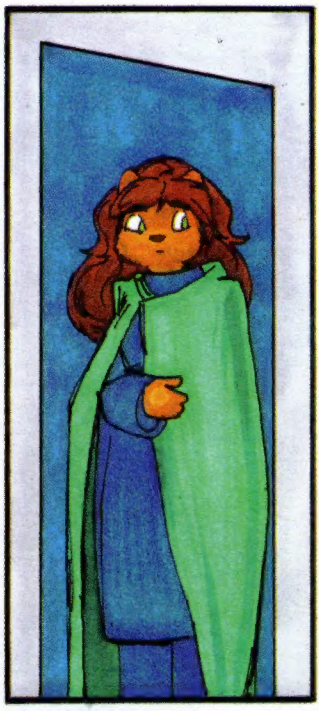
Ah, the good stuff. In fine shape. Bring it in yourself?
No, a spacer friend left it with me.

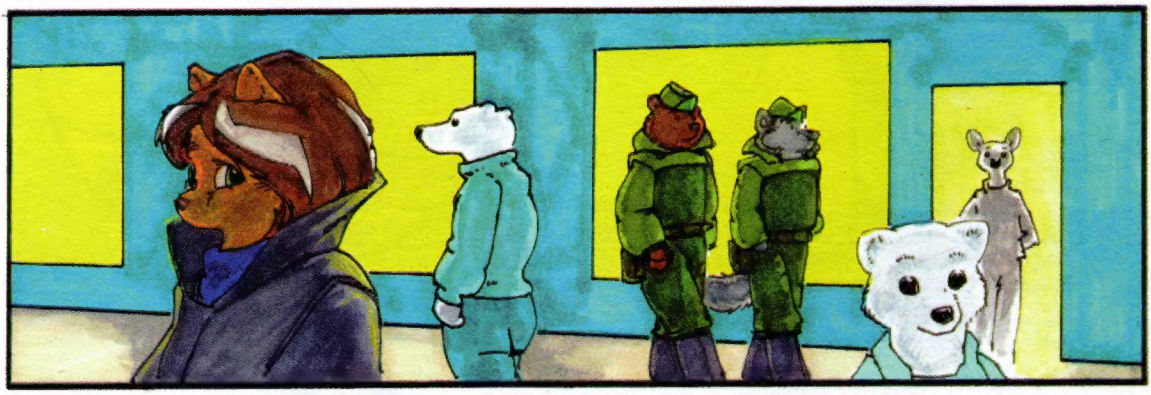

I'd like to get a good price in local currency.
All in cash?
In smaller denominations, if possible.
I see. That would be 168 standard, 218 Denot Stars at the current rate.

V3N1 PB

Please think of me the next time you -
HUH!
I gotta go!







I was still getting that spooked feeling, and having some manner of security types around didn't help.

V3NIP9

I caught another cross-town, hoping to shake that feeling, and the chance that someone might be looking for me.

I got some odds and ends and then found an economy sleeper to lay low in until I could figure out what to do. I also disguised myself somewhat.
EEuww, this itches.
V3NIP11

So weird, going out like this.
Services Administration.
Yes, I'm looking for a position or something?
Eh? Undocumented?
I'm afraid so.
Got a skill card?
No, not yet.
You'll have to come down to the office to do one.
I might be able to pull it off. But what if they want some kind of print or scan?
And most planets aren't so open to undocumented aliens. Maybe that was a ploy to have the ignorant walk right into custody. Considering all the show of force on the streets.
I could hope their compartmentalization of services might help me. But with my luck so far...
V3N1P12

Who knows what they might be keeping a lid on?

EEEP!

I don't know who that was,
but I've never got such a talent reaction,
so I'm not about to find out.

puff pant

Excuse me, citizen.

You're not this person, by chance?

uh - no

Thankew.

A few days later, I was pretty much broke. I checked the newsnet one more time.

-And locally, no further news on the tragic explosion aboard the starship Tzinzanoh, though Port Authority suggests a volatile cargo may have been the source of the deadly blast.

The Security Force announced this morning that the last members of a violent criminal ring have been ounded up. The dangerous hoodlum have been responsible for a series o estructive attacks on civil propertie as part of a larger scheme of intimidation and extortion. This is the third gang of malicious malcontents that the Security Force as successfully curtailed this year spokesman said these gangs were re aberration of anti-social patholog

Nothing useful at all here. I wish I knew what really happened.

Well, this last crunchy bar is it. I'll have to get a skill card now.

A skill card?

Yes.

Your I.D.?

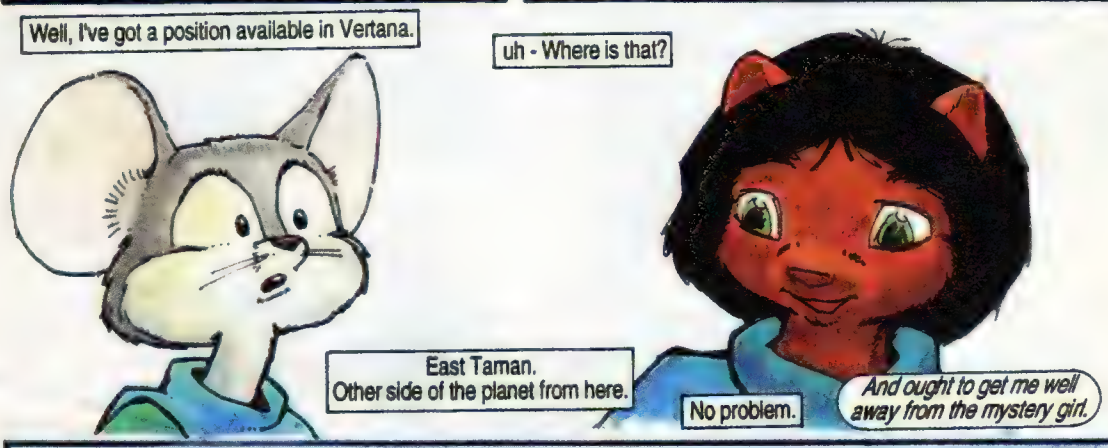
I don't have anything worthwhile.

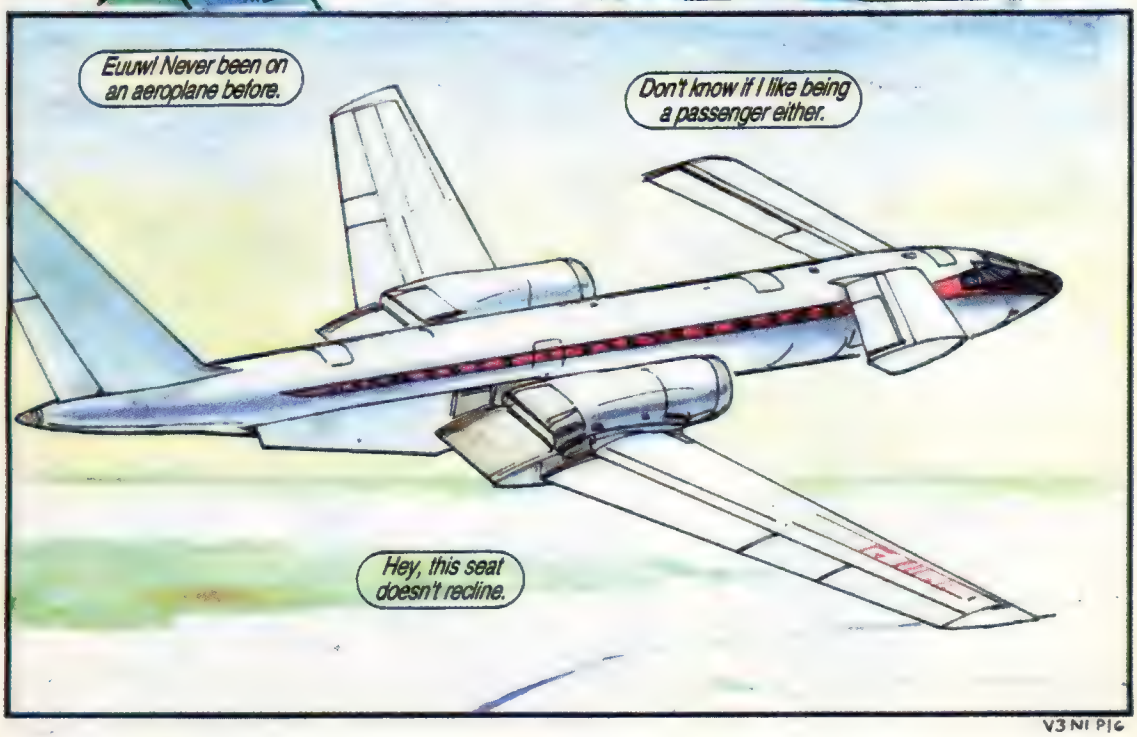
I see. No problem. Just wait for the next available testing booth.

V3NIPIS

oog, haven't needed to do that since school.

This looks good. You've been ship rated.
Yeah, that too.
Where you staying?
Just transient for now.
Interested in a change of scenery?
I could be.


Well, I've got a position available in Vertana.
uh - Where is that?
East Taman. Other side of the planet from here.
No problem.
And ought to get me well away from the mystery girl.


Euuw! Never been on an aeroplane before.
Don't know if I like being a passenger either.
Hey, this seat doesn't recline.

Ugh! I should have asked a few more questions about this place.
I don't know if I'll melt or wash away first.

An undocumented, and no money, I'd bet?
Good looking skill card, though.
Ah'right, until you get some cash flow, the dorms are down and across.

ooh. I've really stepped into something this time.

This the dorm?
For undocumenteds? 'Fraid so.
You're not doing any sym'd cycle biz, are you?

If I understand you correctly, certainly not.
Sorry, but I had to ask. A few of our guests find better income in their rooms than in the field.
I'll find you a unit away from the "traffic."

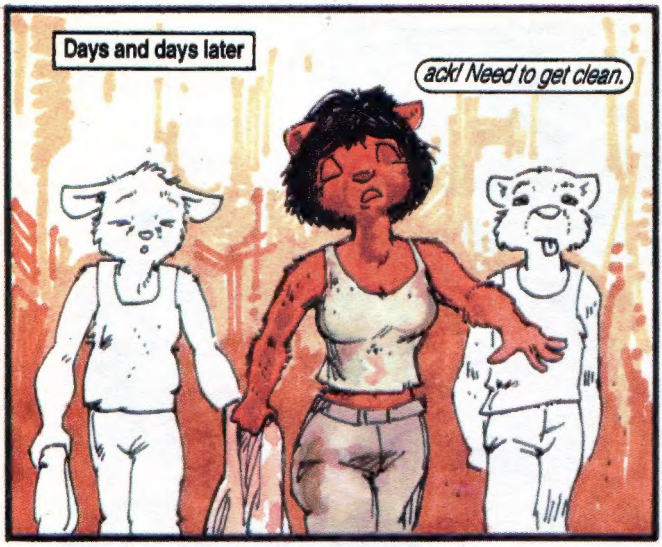
I've seen this before.
Well, maybe not with all the roommates.

Ah, a fresh face.

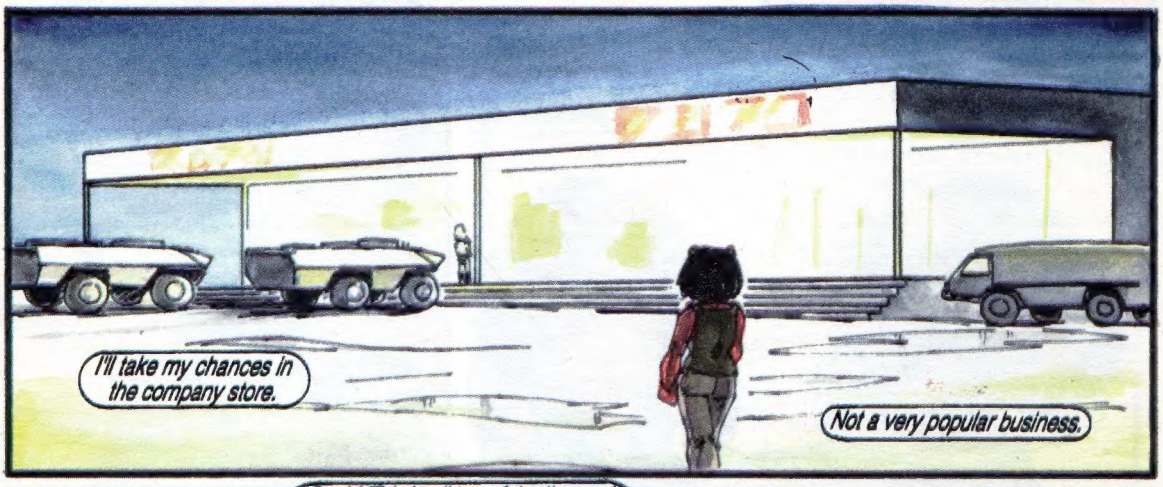
And a good card.
We'll be able to fix you up big time.

Well, it isn't the worst thing I've ever done.

Ewah, I just got my ballance for the company store. I'll never be able to work it all off now.
I told you not to go there. How do you think they keep people here?
Got my travel permit rejected.
What? Why?
Need a current residency I.D.
But they are only issued at Batu.
I know, and I'd need a travel permit to get to Batu. But I need the I.D. to get it.
oh.


Days and days later
ack! Need to get clean.

oh crumb. Hair's growing out.
Need another dye job.


I'll take my chances in the company store.
Not a very popular business.

Oosh! This is all top of the line stuff. Offworld imports - would be expensive even in the open economy.
Someone could easily get into serious trouble here.

ohshit! It's the girl!

gotta try to sneak out.
Erma! Wait! Please!
What?!
Who are you!?
I'm so glad to have found you.
We need to get you out of here.
So, she the one?
You there. You watch yourself.
Thank you, Captain. We're all right here.
I'd like to talk to her alone, if I can?

All right. Now, who are you?
And why have you been hounding me?

I'm your daughter.
Well, your clone daughter.

That would explain a lot.
But who? Why?

My parents are the Ardehabs, of Kawhateena.
I've heard of them.
I found out last year that I was a clone, and I've been looking for you ever since.
Umh. Any particular reason?

I just needed to know who and what you really are. What fragmentary history I could find was too limited and contradictory. I know my upbringing makes me unique - but still - .

I understand.

They seem to be awfully concerned about maintaining an image of normalcy all the time. But, by the way they have been doing things, it's clear to me that they're attempting some kind of cover-up. I think there's a dissident movement here and your ship may have been hit by terrorists. Unfortunately, that may have been my fault. I'd been using some other than above board connections while trying to track you, and it could have given someone the impression of an important covert government activity, with my family connections and all.

Yeah, I can see that.

V3N1P22